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Items for >imprint< no. 107: **Mon. 19th Sept 2022**, please, by email at editor@ccstalbens.org.uk. *Peter Young (Ed.)*

PCC meeting 11th July 2022

Hardship Fund – The PCC were given details of how it was proposed to manage the newly introduced Hardship Fund, to assist in cases of emergency needs for members of our congregation, particularly because of increased energy bills. An approval group has been set up to assess cases brought to their attention for eligibility to receive a grant from the fund, and the PCC unanimously approved the proposed process. More information will be given to church members in the coming weeks, including information on other means of obtaining benefits, and encouragement to church members to look out for those who may be suffering.

Climate and Environmental Emergency Recognition/Declaration Action Plan – The PCC considered and approved the proposals and proposed short-term approximate timelines to implement the steps necessary to create awareness *throughout* our church about creation care and climate change and what needs to be done to reduce our carbon footprint to meet the challenge of net carbon zero for our church by 2030.

Finances – The PCC received an update on the state of our finances for the year to date up to end-April 2022. However it was emphasised that outgoings for the whole of 2022 could not be predicted from the first 4 months only, since bills and other expenditure do not arise at a steady rate. Some concern was expressed at greatly increased energy costs which have arisen since the end of April.

Staffing Subcommittee update – The PCC received a report from the Staffing Subcommittee outlining the issues around the ongoing vacancy for a Communications Co-ordinator and impending Children’s and Families Pastor vacancy, once Becki leaves in September. The Communications role will require a wide range of expertise and influence, e.g. ‘conventional’ means within the church, across many social media platforms and externally via the press and other networks. The subcommittee were encouraged to consider the role further in the light of PCC feedback and return with a proposal after the summer. In the case of Becki’s replacement, the Staffing

Subcommittee advocated not rushing to advertise for a like-for-like replacement, but to take some time to evaluate whether our needs are exactly the same or might now be slightly different in emphasis from before. However that would mean that during this 'interregnum' (which could be up to 1 year) there would need to be further reliance on volunteer support for families and some community activities, similar to what had been done during Becki's maternity leave. There will be further review of this by the subcommittee and PCC in the early autumn.

Mission Action Plan (MAP) Champions – The PCC received progress to date in carrying out some of the early stage actions listed in the MAP. Jeremy felt that although there had also been some activity in one of the three priority areas, Community Visibility, it was of fairly limited range at the moment and it's wider remit needed to be championed. A group of PCC members, some of whom had initially expressed an interest in this area, were identified and were asked to come up with ideas for PCC consideration in late summer/early autumn.

Planned Fire Drill – The PCC were informed that, following training having been received by relevant people (Wardens and Stewards) in fire evacuation procedures, there would be a fire drill (announced) at the end of the morning service on 17th July. It was recommended that information to the congregation about escape routes, etc., should also be disseminated periodically.

The next PCC meeting is scheduled for 12th September.

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS – ELUSIVE ANSWERS – *Rev. Canon Dele Agbelusi*

Why do bad things happen to good people and why do good things happen to bad people? Is there really a God, a loving and powerful God? If there is and He is good, why would he allow suffering in the scale we have seen in our times? On the world scene, Putin is still raining missiles on Ukraine and China is flexing her muscles over Taiwan with a threat to overrun the nation whenever it decides to. In Japan, their former Prime minister was killed through an assassin's bullet and Sri Lanka's oppressed people forced their President out of his palace when they could no longer bear the burden of poverty.

On our shores and in the rest of Europe, hundreds of people have died in the past couple of months due to the heat wave ravaging UK and Europe. The **cynics are having a field day and saying, 'if there is a God who is powerful, he seems to have lost control.'** How sad!

There may be so many whys that we have become so passionate with to the point that when God even attempts to give answers (when He chooses to), the deafening chorus of the "whys" and "why me" drowns out His whispers. I dare not attempt to play God by proffering complete answers to why God allows suffering. But in the light of God's revelation of Himself in Scriptures, we will examine some answers He has given.

To start with, let us imagine a world without pain. What would such a world look like? No more headaches. No more backaches. No more sensations when you put your finger in a fire. No discomfort to warn of a cancerous tumour that is gathering forces for a takeover of your body.

When a lady accidentally uses hot and dried chilli as mascara, she will feel no pains in her eyes. I wonder if anyone reading this piece feels excited at such a world setting. As much as we may abhor pain, we have to admit that it often serves a good purpose.

It warns us when something goes wrong. The cause of the misery, rather than the pain itself is the real problem.

The other reason why people suffer has to do with the entrance of evil into the world. God created a world where people would have the ability to make choices—either good or bad.

David Biebel, in his book, *Men of Integrity*, writes: *"I still don't understand, nearly 10 years later...why the Lord allowed my sons to be afflicted with infantile bilateral striatal necrosis. I don't understand why Jonathan died or why Christopher lived... All I understand is this: life is a riddle, which God wants me to experience but not necessarily solve. When I was struggling to solve it, I found 1 Corinthians 13:12, which only makes sense in the original Greek: 'For now we see (or understand) through a mirror, in a riddle,' the apostle Paul wrote, 'but then face to face'".*

Contemporary Christians sometimes rush to put God's truth into little boxes, when God's perspective on suffering is too big for any of that. **While for some "spirituality" is defined by what you know, God may be more concerned with how you handle what you cannot know or understand.** A riddle loses its mystery once it is solved. **By keeping us in our riddle (every person's riddle is unique) God is helping us learn to walk by faith, and not by sight.**

One man gets nothing but discord out of a piano; another gets harmony. No one claims the piano is at fault. Life is about the same. The discord is there, but so is the harmony. Every trial presents to us a stark option. Either we interpret them as divine abandonment or we receive them as divine invitation— invitation to experience how this trial, like fire, purifies us as gold instead of burning us to ashes.

The Bible is filled with stories of people who God used to show his power. Reading these stories, my heart says "Lord, use me for your glory, show your power through me!" Maybe you can relate. But there is something I missed, or maybe I secretly hoped, that I would be the exception. When God used people to show his power, did he use comfort or trials? The answer is trials—God's most used tool.

Do you want to be used by God? It's worth it, but it isn't easy. If we want to be used by God for his glory, we will be entrusted with trials. But 1 Corinthians 10:13 is equally there, as God's promise.

God uses trials to show that he alone deserves the credit. Trials make it clear to the world that I am not in control. Everyone can see that I don't have the ability or strength to overcome the problem. Therefore, when God works, he gets all the glory, not me.

If I want God to use me for big things, I must pass the little tests. If I don't pass the little tests, why should I expect God to trust me with greater things? The greatest battle that is waged each day for the glory of God is not the one around me, it is the one in me. My sinful heart doesn't want to relinquish control. Trials are God's tool to break my dependence on self so that I will trust in him alone.

As we go through trials, others are watching. They are watching to see if we respond in faith. **Having peace in the midst of comfort is normal. Having peace in the midst of trials is not. However, trials give us an opportunity to speak about the hope that we have.** If I complain or have a bad attitude when facing trials, I forfeit my opportunity to speak of the greatness of God! This doesn't mean I laugh it off. Loss, hurts, a lot. But my joy is in something that cannot be shaken. We can feel incredible loss and unshakable joy in God at the same time.

Through tears we can say with Job, “the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). Or the Psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you...” (Psalm 73:25-26). Or Habakkuk, “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, and the fields yield no food..., yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength” (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

Autumn sermon series

Following conclusion of the sermon mini-series on events in Acts, there will be a break from a formal sequence until September, when a new sermon series starts on aspects of Creation and our place in it as part of God’s Creation. The sermons on this theme planned so far in September follow, however the series is expected to run until Advent, so further titles will follow in future editions of *>imprint<*.

4 th Sept.	Creatures	Genesis 1:1 – 2:4
11 th Sept.	Stewards	Genesis 1:27 – 2:25
18 th Sept.	Disobeying God	Genesis 3
25 th Sept.	Conflict and disunity	Genesis 4:1-16

Caring for Creation

Christ Church Caring for Creation (C4)

C4 meetings, via Zoom, are open to all church members and access details are given in advance via the weekly e-news-sheet. They are normally on the 3rd Monday of each month, but as there is no meeting in August, the next is scheduled for 19th September.

The last meeting was on 18th July, in which the Action Plan that PCC had approved was discussed including how it could be implemented. A proposal to run an event to coincide with the autumn sermon series and the Season of Creation was also discussed and it was decided to hold a guided walk on trees in Batch Wood, possibly on 2nd October. The possibility of arranging a talk on ethical investments/pensions at some point was also mooted and this will be discussed further. Having a list of resources available for small groups to do follow-up studies alongside the Creation sermon series was also considered.

In the regular agenda item on beliefs, the group watched the second of the nine-part video series produced by Tearfund, featuring **Katharine Hayhoe**: go to (<https://www.tearfund.org/campaigns/christianity-and-climate-change-film-series>) where all 9 films and discussion questions can be viewed. The first film was explored in C4’s June meeting. The second film is entitled ‘Climate change is a poverty issue’, which asks how climate change is affecting the developing world. After watching this there was discussion of the various questions posed on the website..

Eco Church – our progress (continued)

In *>imprint<* no.105 we started the process on behalf of C4 of informing you of how we are doing as a church in various areas of creation care and sustainability, using the Eco Church criteria and survey as a guide to the assessments. The aim is to take each of the 5 sections of the survey in turn and publish our preliminary assessments and



score in *>imprint<*. So last time we started with Lifestyle, an area where we felt we might be doing least well. In this issue, it's the turn of Community and Global Engagement, where, on the basis of the 26* out of 27 questions we were able to answer at the time, we provisionally scored 75 out of a possible 230, which would take us just to the bronze level *for this section*. However, as mentioned previously we'd need to reach at least bronze level in all 5 sections to qualify for the Eco Church bronze award. *One answer we were unsure about in this section concerned whether we were registered with the Fairtrade Foundation (Q20), but further research indicates that we probably were in the past and we are now in the process of re-registration.

COMMUNITY AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

1. Our church organises events providing an opportunity for local people to engage with local leaders on local environmental issues (e.g. local MPs, AMs or council leaders)

At least annually Less often Never Need to find out

2. Our church (either alone or as part of a local network) engages with our local MP, AM, local council or Public Service Board on environmental matters:

At least annually Less often Never Need to find out

3. Our church arranges for local environmentalists to speak in our services:

At least annually Less often Never Need to find out

4. Our church (either alone or as part of a local network) works with local sustainability movements like Transition Towns:

Yes No Need to find out

5. Our church (either alone or as part of a local network) organises environmental awareness-raising events (e.g. film evenings, Fairtrade events etc.):

Yes No Need to find out

6. Our church is involved with local conservation work (e.g. at an A Rocha UK Partner in Action or RSPB/Wildlife Trusts nature reserve):

Yes Some members are involved No Need to find out

7. At least some of our church members (either alone or as part of a local network) have organised and/or participated in a community clean-up project (e.g. local litter-pick):

At least annually Less often Never Need to find out

8. Our church (either alone or as part of a local network) hosts a green fair, showcasing local produce and highlighting local environmental issues:

At least annually Less often Never Need to find out

9. Our church organises events providing an opportunity for local people to get out and enjoy God's earth in our local area (e.g. walks, cycle rides etc.):

Regularly Occasionally Never Need to find out

10. Our church either provides or supports a local car-share scheme (this includes members sharing lifts to church):

Yes No Need to find out

11. Users of our church premises are encouraged to minimise resource use (e.g. people are trained in reducing energy use, notices about turning off lights are displayed etc.):

Yes No Need to find out

12. Our church actively promotes Eco Church to other local churches:

Yes No Need to find out

13. Our church has committed to pray for a specific overseas environmental project (for Welsh churches this might be through Wales4Africa):

Yes No Need to find out

14. Our church participates in regular sustainability initiatives (e.g. Carbon Fast, WWF's annual Earth Hour event):

Yes No Need to find out

15. Our church participates in campaigns concerning national environmental issues:

At least annually Less often Never Need to find out

16. Our church participates in campaigns concerning global environmental issues:

At least annually Less often Never Need to find out

17. Our church participates in the Tearfund/Cord 'Toilet Twinning' scheme as follows:

All our toilets are twinned Some of our toilets are twinned

None of our toilets are twinned Need to find out

18. Our church keeps the congregation informed about the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on Christian communities elsewhere in the world:

Yes No Need to find out

19. Our church financially supports an environmental charity:

Yes No Need to find out

20. Our church is registered with the Fairtrade Foundation as a Fairtrade Church:

Yes No Need to find out *re-registration is underway*

21. Wherever possible, Fairtrade and/or ethically sourced goods are used at church services and events:

Yes Sometimes No Need to find out

22. Any meals provided by the church use food that is locally grown:

Always Sometimes Never Need to find out Not applicable
(no meals are provided)

23. Any meals provided by the church use organic ingredients:

Always Sometimes Never Need to find out Not applicable
(no meals are provided)

24. Any meals provided by the church use food that is animal-friendly:

Always Sometimes Never Need to find out Not applicable
(no meals are provided)

25. Any meals provided by the church use Fairtrade ingredients:

Always Sometimes Never Need to find out Not applicable
(no meals are provided)

26. Any meals provided by the church include a vegetarian and /or vegan option:

Always Sometimes Never Need to find out Not applicable
(no meals are provided)

27. Our church takes steps to reduce food waste (e.g. through composting all waste, minimising leftovers at church meals, partnering with a local food waste scheme), and we encourage our members to do likewise:

Yes No Need to find out Not applicable (no meals are provided)

In the next issue of *>imprint<* we'll publish the answers in the Land category.

A Rocha Field Notes Podcasts and Blog

There has been a further **Field Notes podcast** posted since the last issue of *>imprint<*: *Episode 24*, posted on 21st July, introduces **Soowan Park**, A Rocha International's Chair of Trustees. In this episode, entitled 'Sustainable activism and the prayer-driven life', she talks with Peter Harris and Bryony Loveless about how we can sustain our physical, mental and spiritual health when we are expending ourselves for Justice, and how we can face the reality of the world's problems and not be crushed.

Listen to the podcasts at <https://www.arocha.org/en/field-notes-podcast/>, or from wherever you get your podcasts. The format and presenters of the podcasts will be changing after this episode, but further information is still to be released.

A Rocha International blogs: Since the last issue of *>imprint<* three blogs have been posted.

To read the latest blogs or to catch up on ones you might have missed, go to: <https://blog.arocha.org/en/>.

The first is a blog from **Dr Hilary Marlow**, a biblical scholar who researches and writes on faith and the environment, was posted on 6th July, entitled 'Does our pride cause the earth to fall?', an exploration of aspects of Psalm 104 (and other Old Testament references) on the purpose of creation and the outcry against the destructive effects of evil and wickedness.

Dr Marlow holds several academic roles at Girton College, Cambridge, and teaches Old Testament in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge.

You will also find an apparently more recent blog (in German), dated 22nd July; however this appears to be a German translation of Rodel Lasco's blog on 4th May, entitled 'Seek first the kingdom of God' which was previously reviewed in *>imprint<* no.104.

The most recent blog post is by **Jo Swinney**, posted on 3rd August. Jo is currently the Director of Communications at A Rocha International and is also one of the children of the co-founders, Peter and Miranda Harris. In this blog, entitled 'A home in A Rocha', she describes growing up with her family when the very first A Rocha centre, in Portugal, was established.

[By the way, Peter Harris's book, 'Under the Bright Wings', first published in 1993, tells the story in more detail of how Cruzinha, the A Rocha centre on the Algarve, came to be established as a Christian field study centre and bird observatory, from the initial vision of the founders in the early 1980s, up to the time of publication. It is a very interesting and engaging read. There is a copy in C4's library, currently housed at the editor's home(!), but available to lend out to church members on request. - Ed.]